



Marblehead Biography of Frederick Ehat



Fred Ehat circa 1945
Courtesy of his son, Rick

“Frederick ‘Fred’ Ferrea Ehat was born 5 Mar 1920 San Francisco, California. He was the youngest of four children of homemaker Elizabeth Madeline Ferrea (born in 1880 in San Francisco to Italian immigrants) and Frederick M. Ehat (1886-1922), a home decorator and painter born in 1886 in Merced County, California to German Placerville gold rush veterans. Fred had three siblings - Raphael Frederick (1915–1985); Noel Virginia (1916–1989); and Jeanne Louise (1918–1923).

“Fred was orphaned by the time he was five years of age. His father died in the dentist’s chair in 1922 after complaining of a toothache as the family was waiting in the car to take the long trip around the Bay to the Russian River for holiday. His mother died in 1925 of diphtheria. He also lost one of his older sisters when he was 3 years old. He and his brother Raphael were raised in SF by his grandmother while his older sister was raised across the Bay in Marin County by other relatives.

“Fred pretty much had a hard scrabble childhood. He sold SF Call Bulletin newspapers on downtown corners and eventually dropped out of Mission High School. He often bragged about watching the Golden Gate Bridge being constructed and walking across bridge the first day it was open. He watched ships come in and out of the gate all during his youth. He lied about his age when he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression and began working on a firefighting crew in today’s Trinity County, Northern California. He talked of having to sleep on the sides of hills and of waking up at their bottom! He joined the US Navy on 12 Mar 1940 in San Francisco, a week after his 20th birthday, and was assigned Service #3760362. He was sent to San Diego, CA for basic training.

“At home, there wasn’t much discussion about boot camp, but he clearly knew San Diego and Pearl Harbor. He mentioned many times how shortly after arriving in the South Pacific joining the Dutch - Australian Navy fleet which he felt seemed odd, but interesting. He mentioned how they were supposed to keep an “eye” on the Japanese. The USS Marblehead (CL-12) was one of several ships he served on. I remember many times looking through his navy album(s) and seeing a list of ships, but clearly Marby², as she was affectionately referred to by her crew, was the most memorable. The role of the ship dramatically changed after December 7, 1941.”

However, *Marby* was not the first vessel that Fred served on. Although the Muster Rolls (MR’s) and Reports of Changes (RoCs) of the *USS Colorado (BB-45)* could not be located for the year 1940, that ship appears to have been the first vessel that Fred sailed on after he completed basic training on around 7 May 1940³ (additional specialized training may have kept him in San Diego a bit longer). We believe that he was aboard the *Colorado* when she left San Diego on 2 April 40 for Hawaii to participate in Fleet Exercise XXI (war games designed to deter Japanese aggression). However, the *Colorado* was primarily a means of transport to another battleship, the *USS New Mexico (BB-40)*, which operated from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii from 6 Dec 40 to 20 May 41. The 14 Jun 40 Report of Changes of the *USS New Mexico (BB-40)* indicates that Fred, then an Apprentice Seaman (AS) fresh from basic training, was received for duty aboard the *USS New Mexico* from the *USS Colorado* on 14 Jun 40. Aboard *USS New Mexico*, eff 12 Jul 40, Fred was promoted from AS to Sea2c, his initial rank after completing basic training. He remained aboard the *USS New Mexico* through the end of 1940.

On 19 Jan 41, Fred was transferred from *USS New Mexico* to the Receiving Station at Pearl Harbor for further forwarding to the *USS Chaumont (AP-5)*, one of the two veteran transports that kept the Asiatic Fleet supplied with sailors. His ultimate destination in this transfer was to be the Asiatic Station, which usually meant either Shanghai, China in the summer or Manila, Philippines in the winter, but in this case, the transfer occurred on 5 Feb 41 to the

¹ The majority the narrative in the opening paragraphs above were provided by Fred’s younger son, Rick, hence the quotation marks throughout.

² With few exceptions, the nickname “*Marby*” is used to refer to the ship throughout the rest of this biography.

³ In 1940, basic training took eight weeks to complete which meant that Ehat would have been available for his first duty station on or about 7 May 1940, though he may have taken leave or had additional, more specialized training that kept him in San Diego longer. After the U.S. declared of war, the period of basic training was shortened considerably.



USS *Marblehead* (CL-12), or simply *Marby* as she was affectionately referred to by her crew. At that time, *Marby* was temporarily in Guam.

Fred spent the next year and four and a half months on *Marby*, one of the most exciting and professionally rewarding periods of his life. The events of that period included the bombing of the ship on 4 Feb 42 and her subsequent 20,589-mile, 90-day escape from Java to New York, which is fully described in [Marby's own biography](#) and in the 1944 book, [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#).

Fred joined *Marby* late in the ship's history with Asia, which began when she joined the Asiatic Fleet in 1938. Normally, she wintered in the Philippines working from Manila and she summered in China operating from Shanghai. Shanghai was then one of the globe's most cosmopolitan cities, a trading, financial and artistic powerhouse with a potent mix of opium smuggling, gambling, and prostitution. Unfortunately, China, and Shanghai in particular, were the focus of Japan's strategy to control Asia. Its annexation of China's industrial heartland, Manchuria, in 1932, and its commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, had escalated tension with the United States.

By the time Fred arrived, Japan controlled all the ports of China except for Hong Kong, and while *Marby* did spend the summer of 1940 in China, when she sailed from Tsingtao in early September that year, it was a final farewell. Except for the cruise to Guam, she spent the remainder of 1940 and most of 1941 in Philippine waters focusing on battle training as war grew increasingly likely in the minds of *Marby's* skipper, Captain A.G. Robinson, and the rest of the ship's leadership and crew. As a result, Fred would miss seeing China and many of the other exotic stops in the Orient. But not all of them!

On 25 Nov 41, roughly ten months after Fred joined the ship, Asiatic Fleet Commander Admiral Thomas Hart, sensing that hostilities were imminent, ordered most of his ships to leave the Philippines without fanfare and disperse to the southwest, into the Netherlands East Indies (NEI; today's Indonesia). On the night of the 29th, *Marby* dropped her anchor off of Tarakan Island, East Borneo, NEI to await further orders. The ship was darkened for additional security.

Ten days later, at 0328 hours on 8 Dec 41, *Marby's* radio receiver crackled with news of the attack on Pearl Harbor and conveyed the order: "The Japanese have commenced hostilities. Act accordingly." *Marby's* General Quarters alarm began blaring moments later, and the crew's response foretold the training, discipline and spirit that would later save the ship, i.e., from their deep sleep, the entire 700+ crew was standing at attention at their battle stations within eight minutes.⁴

At dawn, *Marby* weighed her anchor and headed for Balikpapan, an oil port on the south coast of Borneo, where she refueled. She then cut across the strait to Makassar, South Celebes Island to reprovision. By Christmas, she was at the Dutch Naval Base at Surabaya, Java. There, Capt. Robinson granted his men limited shore leave despite the risk of Japanese air attack. Whether Fred went ashore or not is unclear.

In the days that followed, details poured in on the Pearl Harbor disaster, particularly on the eight battleships sunk or damaged there. Then, on 10 December came news of the loss of British battleships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* in the South China Sea east of peninsula Malaya. Previously, battleships had been considered invincible but Japanese naval air superiority had just made quick victims of those British behemoths. These events sharpened *Marby's* crew's focus on the ship's vulnerabilities. "For if those great British and American battlewagons, with their vast belts of bulges designed to serve as torpedo shock absorbers, couldn't take it from the Japanese fliers, what chance had an old bucket like the *Marby* whose A.A. battery was but a tiny fraction of any of those capital ships and whose slender sides had no such protection? Any torpedo that struck her would strike below her fragile armor belt which was only three inches thick at its heaviest. Her main battery could not be used against planes, and the seven 3-inch A.A.'s plus four .50 calibre machine guns atop the foremast and four more aft amounted to something considerably less than impressive."⁵

⁴ In an undated letter to his sister Noel decades later, Fred added that "At the time the war started, or should I say, when it involved us, I was a Seaman 1st class in the First Division of the USS *Marblehead*. The duty I had, that is before we lightened the ship, was 'bow hook on the captain's gig.'"

⁵ [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), p. 42.



On the last days of 1941, *Marby* was cutting across the Flores Sea, escorting the French mail ship, *MS Marechal Joffre* from Surabaya to Darwin, Australia. Formerly owned by the pro-Nazi Vichy French government, *Marechal Joffre* had been brazenly captured by American naval aviators and ground crews in Manila Bay and used to escape the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Once in Darwin, *Marechal Joffre* sailed on to San Francisco to be inducted into the U.S. Navy (see the [Marechal Joffre Story](#)). Meanwhile, for a few days, *Marby* temporarily became Radio Darwin, a beacon that facilitated the regrouping of remaining Allied warships to slow the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia. In that effort, *Marby* soon headed north, and on 20 Jan 42, she covered Destroyer Division 59 (*USS John D. Ford*, *USS Parrott*, *USS Paul Jones*, and *USS Pope*) in its retirement from a raid on a Japanese convoy at Balikpapan in which five enemy ships were sunk, two badly damaged, and two lightly damaged. Fred was aboard for the fight.

Marby spent the last week of January 1941 back in Surabaya, and by 1 February, she was cruising off Madura Strait. On 3 February, a flight of about 40 Japanese planes passed overhead enroute to bomb Surabaya. One plane lingered to get reconnaissance on the ships below which also included heavy cruiser *USS Houston*, the smaller Dutch cruisers, *De Ruyter* and *Tromp*, and seven Dutch and American destroyers.

The following morning “*broke red, burnishing the bottoms of clouds that floated across the sky before a mild westerly breeze. The lookouts could see the high mountains of Bali looming in the distance. ... A little after 0900, Admiral Doorman on De Ruyter received a dispatch which he then flashed to all ships: “37 bombers to Surabaya, course SSW.”*”⁶ By the time the message reached *Marby*’s Capt. Robinson, the ship’s lookouts had spotted the planes approaching from the east at 17,000 feet. Each had the red sun of Japan painted on its tail and wings. All hell soon broke loose.

Despite its successful evasive action on the first three bomb runs *Marby* eventually suffered two direct hits and a third near-miss “close to her port bow.” The damage was severe – one bomb jammed *Marby*’s rudder causing her to steam in a predictable circle. Another strike knocked out her gyroscope, all electricity and internal communication. Multiple fires soon swept the ship. The near miss ripped a large gash in *Marby*’s bow flooding compartments and causing the ship to begin to sink. Fortunately, the enemy assumed the sea would finish *Marby* off, so they went after bigger prey, the heavy cruiser *USS Houston* (CA-30).

The Japanese would claim several on several occasions that they had sunk *Marby*, but they knew nothing of the character of the men to whom she was home. Eleven sailors were killed that day and another eighty-four were injured, five of whom later died of their wounds, but the remaining able-bodied crew rose to defy the odds, the Japanese, and the Java Sea. After bailing by hand non-stop for more than seventy hours, over the next ninety days, they would coax the crippled cruiser 20,589 miles across the Indian and Atlantic oceans to enter New York harbor on 4 May 42. *Marby*’s bombing in the Battle of Makassar Strait and her escape to New York are described in detail in *Marby*’s own biography and in the 1944 book *Where Away – a Modern Odyssey*.

Though the Japanese kept claiming in the international press that they had sunk *Marby*, for security reasons, the Navy never refuted the claims, keeping her improbable voyage home secret until she made New York harbor on 4 May. That secrecy meant that loved ones back home thought their sailors were either dead or in enemy captivity. On 5 May, phone calls began flooding across the nation, bringing the truth, and joy, to hundreds of families, and of course, sadness to others whose worst fears were confirmed.

In one of his fireside chats, President Roosevelt had singled out *Marby*’s crew as an inspiration to the nation. On their arrival in New York City, the crew was granted 30 days leave, but “Fred decided not to let anyone know he was alive. He boarded a train across the country heading for San Francisco. His arrival in his hometown completed his trip entirely around the world. His grandmother, who had raised him and who, due to the Japanese propaganda, believed he was dead, answered a knock on the door to find him standing there. Suffice it to say, it was an emotional and dramatic greeting.”

Following his leave, Fred returned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and worked as part of the team that overhauled and modernized *Marby* as much as was possible for a ship of considerable age and damage. However, as the overhaul neared completion, on 3 Oct 42, Fred lost his footing on a gangplank and a large wooden sliver jammed into his leg

⁶ [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#), p. 108-109



sending him to the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn for treatment. He was still in the hospital when *Marby* weighed anchor on 15 Oct 42 and left New York and began a 3,578-mile run back to the Brazilian port of Recife, from which she would spend most of the rest of the war hunting Nazi submarines and blockade runners and occasionally rescuing Allied flyers and enemy sailors adrift in lifeboats.

In Aug 1944, off the southern coast of France, *Marby* shelled German positions in support of Operation Dragoon, the highly successful invasion of Southern France near St. Tropez (not far from where this biography was written). The invasion sparked a German retreat, the surrender of thousands of German soldiers, and enabled the Allied capture the key ports of Marseilles and Toulon which the Allies quickly put to use.

Of course, Fred saw none of that action, but he still had plenty to keep him busy. Exactly what that was we cannot answer with certainty, but we have some good clues.



Partial view of the Operation Dragoon invasion fleet in August 44 off France's south Coast. Courtesy: Wikipedia

On 19 Nov 42, four days after *Marby* left him in New York, the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn, transferred Fred to the Navy receiving station in Brooklyn, after which on 23 Nov 42 he transferred to the Lido Beach, Long Island, NY for further forwarding to the Navy's Operating Base at Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Fred's son, Rick, recalls that many years after WWII ended, Fred "*spoke of going to New England ('the coldest I have ever been walking along the harbor in Boston at night'), and then on to the UK. He spoke of working on the deceptions that the Army and Navy had conducted around D-Day, mentioning wooden boats.*" What Fred seemed to have been recalling was the period just after *Marby* left him in New York; i.e., his subsequent transfer, via Lido Beach, Long Island, to the Navy's Operating Base in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, which he reached on 29 Dec 42. He would remain Northern Ireland for a year and ten months, a period which included both the 6 Jun 44 D-day landings in western France and the aforementioned Invasion of Southern France on 15 Aug 44. This would be a productive period for Fred during which he advanced to the rate of Coxswain (COX), and on 1 Dec 43 to Boatswain's Mate second class (BM2c).

The base at Londonderry was a perfect staging point for escorting Atlantic convoys, patrolling U-boat-infested waters, staging invasion troops, craft, supplies, essential support services, and other services such as repairs, refueling, and resupply. Its deepwater port and proximity to Scotland and western approaches made it a key Allied base important for the D-Day preparations and the deceptions which would precede it, such as Fred alluded to in his talks with Rick. Among others, those deceptions included those listed in the following table:

Operation	Region Targeted	Goal	Timing	Deception Tactics
Fortitude North	Norway/Scandinavia	Threaten northern invasion	Jan–June 1944	Fake 4th Army, radio traffic, and diplomatic ruses
Fortitude South	Pas-de-Calais	Mask Normandy invasion	Jan–July 1944	FUSAG ⁷ , Patton, dummies, double agents
Zeppelin	Balkans, Southern France, Greece	Threaten southern invasions	Spring/Summer 1944	Radio chatter, double agents, false buildup

It was not possible to determine which of the deceptions Fred contributed to or the precise nature of his work.

By 30 Sep 44, Fred had been transferred to the Navy's Air Transport Service Detachment (NATS) at Lough Neagh (Crumlin), Northern Ireland. While there, he appears to have been promoted to BM1c.

The NATS Detachment also played a supporting role in Allied deception, particularly in the broader effort to confuse German intelligence and military planners about Allied intentions and movements. While the primary mission of NATS was logistical—transporting personnel, mail, and equipment across the Atlantic—its presence at Lough Neagh intersected with Allied deception in two ways:

⁷ FUSAG stood for First U.S. Army Group, which was the fictional army group intended to lead the Germans to believe that the main Allied invasion force would land at Pas-de-Calais and be led by General George Patton, who the Germans allegedly feared.



- Operational Deception Support: Masking True Air Movements. In this, Lough Neagh served as a seaplane base, hosting aircraft such as the Consolidated PB2Y Coronado and PBY Catalina, which were capable of transatlantic flights. This activity at the base contributed to:
 - Generating air traffic patterns that could confuse German aerial reconnaissance and signal intelligence (SIGINT).
 - Supporting “normal” operations that helped conceal the buildup of real invasion forces elsewhere.
 - Keeping logistics and transport flights operating from Lough Neagh enabled the Allies to maintain an air of routine operations in Northern Ireland to mask more strategically significant movements elsewhere.
- Strategic Deception: As part of larger deception efforts like Operation Fortitude North, Northern Ireland was portrayed as a potential launching point for an invasion of Norway. NATS activities, including personnel and aircraft movements, played into this illusion by:
 - Their continued presence at bases like Crumlin (Lough Neagh) reinforced the fiction of a strong Allied interest in Northern theaters.
 - German intelligence may have observed sustained air transport activity and interpreted it as a sign of troop buildup or logistical preparation for a northern front assault.
 - This deception helped support Operation Bodyguard, the overarching plan to mislead the Germans about the time and place of the D-Day invasion.

These roles were subtle but strategically important in the broader tapestry of deception leading up to the Normandy landings (D-Day) and beyond, eventually including the Invasion of Southern France, which the *Marby* supported, though it is not clear whether Fred ever knew of her participation in it. Again, it was not possible to determine which of the deceptions Fred contributed to or the precise nature of his work.

Effective 23 Oct 44 Fred was received from NATS by the Receiving Station at the Navy Yard in Washington the Detachment in Northern Ireland. And he is present at the Navy Yard in Washington at the quarter’s end on 31 Dec 44. A month later, he was transferred to the Training Station (Ships Co. and Others) at Newport, Rhode Island by the Navy Yard, Washington, DC, and he spent two months there apparently preparing for his next and final assignment, the USS *Selinur*).

On 21 Apr 1945, Fred was part of the crew present aboard at the commissioning of USS *Selinur* (AKA-41), a new Artemis-class attack cargo ship. The ship contributed to the war effort in the Pacific in the Marshall Islands from 1 to 8 Aug 45 and from 4 to 9 Oct in the Philippines, and from October 45 to January 46 in transporting occupation troops to Japan and bringing veterans home from the Pacific via San Francisco as part of the Magic Carpet operation. Frederick Ferria Ehat BM1c(T) was transferred off *Selinur* effective 21 Feb 46 to RS Treasure Island, San Francisco, CA.

Fred Ehat, BM1c, was present at the station at US Navy Receiving Station, Shoemaker, CA at the quarter’s end on 1 Apr 46. He received an honorable discharge there shortly thereafter.

“Fred met his future wife, Nina Marie Weck, while living in a boarding house on Herman St. in San Francisco. She was the daughter of Irish and German immigrants, respectively Nina Ahern and Dr. Frederick William Weck. Nina had had her own WW2 adventure in the early 1940s. Their parents had already passed away, and when all three of her brothers left for the service, Nina, and her older sister Ann, both teachers, decided that it was time to move West from Chicago. They had little money, but eventually they found someone who was in the business of sending tires to west coast buyers due to the rubber shortage. They borrowed that fellow’s car, paid for the fuel, and headed West. To this day it is difficult to understand how they made it to San Francisco since neither of them was safe behind the wheel. Fred used to say that an angel was watching over them.



Nina Weck 1939
Graduate of Chicago
Teacher’s College and
wife of Fred Ehat.
Courtesy of Ancestry.com

“Nina soon learned what a football fan she was dating when Fred brought her to a 49ers-Bears game at Kesar Stadium. While there, she had an attack of appendicitis. Fred took her to the hospital and then returned to the stadium to catch the 4th quarter!



"Fred and Nina married on 27 Nov 48. She was the daughter of Dr. Frederick William Weck and Nina L. Weck, and was born on 11 Dec 1915 in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The couple eventually moved to the south bay where Fred worked predominantly in the defense industry as a machinist for the Sylvania GTE Corporation. They had two sons: Karl Frederick and Frederick Phillip.

"Some of Fred's Navy stories were related to the food, such as absolute love of cornbread which he crumbled over many dishes, often mixing with ketchup. And, of course, there was chicken! He was so sick of chicken that his sons never had it for dinner growing up.



Fred and Nina
Courtesy: Son Rick

"Fred's mother was a graduate of The Mark Hopkins Institute of Art⁸, a significant cultural institution in San Francisco. She was an accomplished artist and art teacher in the city. Fred clearly inherited her talent, winning several awards for his oil paintings.

"Upon retirement, Fred and Nina moved to Northern California, to Paradise (of course). Fred and Nina lived long enough to meet four of their grandchildren - Paul Daniel and Katherine Anne (Stricklin) from son Karl, and Andrew Charles and Carolyn Marie (Guajardo) from son Frederick (Rick). Rick, in an early life relationship, fathered a daughter. Rick tried for many years to find her, but records were sealed. Through circumstances, he reunited with her (Claire Anne Robertson – married with three sons) 49 years later."

Fred passed away on 8 Mar 96 in Paradise, Butte County, California and was buried in Oak Hill Memorial Park, San Jose, Santa Clara County, CA.

Nina later moved to Lakewood, Colorado and then to Durango, La Plata, to be closer to family (son Rick lived there with his wife and children). Nina passed away in Durango on 5 Dec 2007 and was buried alongside Fred.

Fred and Nina would be pleased to know that on Memorial Day, 29 May 2023, in Riverdale Regional Park, Adams County, Colorado inaugurated The Adams County Veterans Memorial to pay tribute to the valor and sacrifice of those who have defended our nation throughout history. They would have been overjoyed to also learn that their grandson, Andrew Charles Ehat, through his employer, played a role in the memorial's landscape design which prominently features a replica of Fred's first ship, the *USS Colorado (BB-45)*, jutting out into beautiful Mann-Nyholt Lake.



Frederick Ferria Ehat is listed on page 238 of the 1944 book [Where Away – A Modern Odyssey](#).

Don't forget to read [Marby's own biography](#).

Biography by Rick Ehat and Steve Wade, son of Frank V. Wade, BM2c, USS Marblehead 1939-1945, with contributions from Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other Internet records.

Corrections, additions, and photos are welcomed by email to spwade@gmail.com.

⁸ The Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, endowed in 1893 by Edward F. Searles and linked to the University of California, once a significant cultural force in San Francisco, was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire.